

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article/1010/42/376785.htm>

A U.S. Congress-backed panel has included Russia on its watch list of countries where people's religious freedoms are at risk.

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** said the main reason it had put Russia on the watch list of 11 countries was the creation in February of the Justice Ministry's Expert Religious Studies Council, "which was given extremely wide powers to investigate religious organizations, including their activities and literature, for a broad array of reasons, including extremism."

"While governments have a duty to combat acts of violent extremism as part of their obligation to protect citizens, there have been expressions of serious concern over the establishment, as well as the composition and expansive mandate, of this new council," it said in a report released Friday.